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HOW TO READ THE LABEL

Pickles

Pickles are made and consumed in practically all countries. They are one of the oldest food products. They were growing cucumbers over 3,000 years ago in India and history has its famous characters who considered a pickle necessary to their daily diet. Pickling is a splendid medium of food preservation. In the broad sense, pickling applies to any vegetable product that has been preserved by means either of salt or vinegar solution. Some meat products are pickled. Pickled olives, retaining their characteristic flavor, have been uncovered from the ruins of Pompeii and Pompeii was buried by the lava and ashes of Vesuvius in 79 A.D.

When your Food and Drug Administration considers pickles, they not only think of cucumbers in brine or vinegar, but likewise of cauliflower, sauerkraut, mangoes, beets, onions, walnuts, gingers, beans, celery, turnips, carrots and various Chinese roots and plants. All of these products, and more, occasionally reach our shores as pickles or as component parts of mixed pickles.

Pickling is an art. Pickle manufacture necessitates controlled fermentation and fermentations are not always easy to control.

What happens in the process of pickle manufacture? What really occurs is this. In the fermentation of cucumbers in brine, lactic acid is produced. It's the lactic fermentation that, in part, insures the proper keeping qualities of your pickles and your sauerkraut. Cucumbers, as received at the plant, are placed in a brine of approximately 10% strength. The brine draws moisture from the cucumbers and more salt is added to the solution from time to time. With the moisture from the cucumber also comes the fermentable sugar and this sugar furnishes the nourishment for the lactic bacteria, which, in the brine solution, produce a weak acid solution chiefly lactic. This acid brine is the principal agent which brings about the changes in color, taste and texture, which accompany the passing of a cucumber into the pickle state. Such pickles are termed "salt pickles" or "salt stock." For the manufacture of "sour" or "sweet" pickles, it is necessary to leach out some of the salt absorbed by the pickle in its curing process. Then, holding the pickles either in pure vinegar or a sweetened spiced vinegar solution for the necessary time, gives the desired sour or sweet pickle flavor.

There are various kinds of pickles: salt pickles, sour pickles, sweet pickles, dill pickles, mixed pickles, not to mention sauerkraut. Various spices or combinations of spices and spice oils are used to flavor them.

Now, how may the housewife be sure of getting her money's worth?

She will have to read and understand what the labels mean. Remember that cucumbers, as received by some manufacturers, are graded into as many as 25 different sizes. The smallest are known as "Midgets" and frequently so labeled. "Gherkins" are somewhat larger, ranging from 1 to 2 inches in length, and counting from 250 to 650 per gallon.

"Small Pickles" range from 2 to 3 inches in length, and count from 130 to 250 per gallon.

"Mediums" range from 3 to 4 inches in length and count from 40 to 130.

"Large Pickles" are those over 4 inches in length. They count from 12 to 40 per gallon.

"Hubbins" are misshapen pickles. Their quality corresponds favorably with other pickles, except that they are irregular, frequently of gourd shape.

"Dill Pickles" generally include the medium and large sizes. They are made by a special process. The flavor of dill herb characterizes such a product. In their preparation, a weaker brine solution is used. This permits faster fermentation and curing. Some manufacturers add the dill herb in a vinegar solution after the pickles are cured with salt. Others add the dill direct to the brine in which pickles are cured, using no vinegar at all. This is the genuine dill pickle or "German Dill."

"Sauerkraut" is shredded cabbage that has been put down in salt. Manufacturers call it tanking. Layers of cabbage and salt are placed in tanks. The added salt, in amount not less than 2% or more than 3%, makes its own brine from the water in the cabbage. A lactic acid fermentation results. When acidity of solution reaches 1-1/2%, the manufacture is complete.

"Sweet Pickles" owe their sweetness to sugar absorbed from sugar solutions after their curing has been effected in brine. The majority of sweet pickles available to you are characterized by spice flavors. Some manufacturers add essential oils while others instill the flavor with the sugar solution in which the whole spice has been cooked in the preparation of the sirup.

"Sour Pickles" owe their sour flavor to the vinegar added after the brine-curing process is completed.

Most "Mixed Pickles" contain, in addition to cucumbers, cauliflower and onions. Other vegetables present vary with individual manufacturing practices.

"Chow Chow", or "Mustard Pickles," are mixed sour pickles covered with a mustard sauce or dressing.

"Sweet Mustard Pickles" are usually of the same composition as chow chow, except sugar characterizes the product instead of vinegar.

On all pickle packages, note the net contents statement. Some manufacturers label the count of pickles within the container. Net-weight statements apply to weight of pickles exclusive of brine.

Where volume statements, such as 1 pint or 1 gallon, appear, the pickles must completely fill the volume specified. You would not want a container, labeled 1 pint, to contain 1/4th pint pickles and 12 fluid ounces of vinegar.

The Government has specified the drained weight of sauerkraut that must be present in each size of tin in which it is packed. Manufacturers know this and government agents check them up.

